



Philippians

Living a Happy and Holy Life

Week 5

The Christian life – Part 2

3:1-11 The True Basis of Confidence



Jewish First? Acts 15:1-35

- ❖ Let's look back to 49AD. The issue of circumcision burns hot! A decision-making council is called in Jerusalem.
- ❖ Peter draws on his experience with Cornelius, the Roman Centurion, to defend the covenantal status of the uncircumcised Christians.
 - Paul doesn't paint nearly so neat a picture of Peter. See Galatians 2:11-14
 - Paul and Barnabas share their own experiences.
- ❖ James appeals to Scripture and sends out a letter that the traditional "marks of the law" such as circumcision are not essentials.
 - The food suggestions speak to desire for common table fellowship of Gentile-Christians and Jewish-Christians. The Gentiles need to avoid eating what offends the Jews. The theology is a little messy, but it is a practical theology grounded in the concrete expression of Christian love.



Circumcision and the Jerusalem Council

- ❖ Big issues are never quickly resolved in the church.
 - With Cornelius' conversion, Gentiles are "in" – but what does it mean for them to be taken into the covenant? Are they not to take on the sign of the covenant given to Abraham? If not, how will we tell the people of God from those who are not?
- ❖ This is "theological process."
 - How does the church work through dissension and disagreement?
 - The evidence is often experience but the authority is God, who speaks through Scripture.
- ❖ Even though a verdict is reached, the issue does not go away, as borne out in Paul's letters. It is obviously still a hot topic when Paul writes this letter to the Philippians.
 - Church pronouncements do not end the issues!

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Faith & the "works/marks of the Law"

- ❖ In Romans 4, Paul sets out to demonstrate that beginning with Abraham, God had always intended that humanity's reconciliation with God would include Gentiles and Jews and would be grounded upon faith.
 - Paul's view is that Abraham was not Jewish when God made the covenant with him. He was uncircumcised and did not have the Law. He was just a guy. A guy who trusted his Lord. It was this trust that proved the wisdom of God's choice. It was always about this faith/trust. Faith would be the means by which God's promise to Abraham would be extended to all the world. It follows that even Abraham's physical family is not God's final goal. It is about faith, not DNA . . . as brought out by the wonderful story of Ruth, a Moabite who entered the people of God by virtue of her faith.
- ❖ Circumcision, the food laws, the Sabbath, and so on are what Paul means by the "works of the Law." They were believed to be the boundary markers around God's people. Now, in Christ, the boundary marker is clear the membership badge in the people of God, is faith; namely, faith in Jesus Christ.

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A “reasonable” chronology of Paul’s life

- ❖ 5BC – born in Tarsus
- ❖ 30-33AD – persecutes Christians
- ❖ 33 – encounters Jesus
- ❖ 33-36 – three years in Arabia Minor and Damascus
- ❖ 37-48 – years of early missionary work in Syria and Cilicia
- ❖ 48-49 -- 1st journey
- ❖ 49 – Council meeting in Jerusalem re circumcision
- ❖ 50-52 -- 2nd journey, including 18 months in Corinth
- ❖ Mid-50’s -- 3rd journey. 2-3 years in Ephesus, including possible imprisonment
- ❖ 57-59 – arrest in Jerusalem and trip to Rome
- ❖ 60-62 – under house arrest in Rome
- ❖ 62-66 – released in Rome, further missionary work
- ❖ 66 – executed in Rome

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Paul – diaspora Jew, Pharisee & persecutor

- ❖ The Diaspora
 - For centuries there had been a growing number of Jews living away from Palestine. Most used the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT done in Alexandria). It is likely that Paul was educated in Greek language, culture, philosophy, fine arts and so on. Paul moved to Jerusalem at some point in his youth.
- ❖ The Pharisees
 - Paul was a zealous Pharisee, committed to the keeping of the Law, to Israel’s purity (separation from the Gentiles), and the bodily resurrection from the dead. Paul never saw himself as having abandoned Judaism – most of his fellow Jews abandoned their own Messiah.
- ❖ Persecution of the Jesus-followers
 - Paul was very aggressive in his persecution of the first Christians. After his encounter with Jesus, he was viewed, understandably, with deep suspicion by Jesus’ followers and spent considerable time becoming part of the movement. As Paul put it himself, he “was violently persecuting the Church of God and was trying to destroy it” (Galatians 1:13).

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Paul's transforming experience

- ❖ Appearance
 - Paul said that Jesus appeared to him just he did to the original apostles and believers (1 Corinthians 15:5-8). A great deal of Paul's theology followed from this experience. Here's the question: *What are the implications of the fact that Jesus was resurrected?* Paul's theology sought to answer that question.
- ❖ Call and commission
 - Paul said that God called him, as God had called Jeremiah and the rest. Paul's call carried with it a commission – to take the Good News to the Gentiles (Galatians 1:16). Paul's encounter with the risen Christ showed him that the last days had begun, which meant that it was time for the Gentiles to come into God's household – and it was his job to urge them to do so.
- ❖ Conversion
 - Not a change of religions – but a conversion of religious identity and community. It entailed a radical change in belief, behavior, and belonging.

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Breaking with the past (3:1-6)

- ❖ In v. 1b, Paul is referring to what he is about to write. It doesn't trouble the Philippians so much, but Paul still feels the need to address it.
 - The problem of "Judaizers"
 - It may be that this section is a response to earlier correspondence.
- ❖ With the coming of Christ, Paul believes, the only true circumcision is a "circumcision of the heart."
- ❖ Paul makes it clear that if this was about keeping the Law, he would be at the top of the list. He was zealous, righteous, and blameless.

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Debits and credits (3:7-11)

- ❖ All the “privileges” which Paul once claimed – his Jewish identity, his keeping of the law, his zealotness – are actually not to his credit at all. All of it is moved to the “debit” side of the ledger. It was “rubbish.”
- ❖ His “credit” is comprised solely of Christ, and Paul’s covenant membership among God’s people which is his by virtue of Jesus’ faithfulness – even to death on a cross.
- ❖ Paul is “in Christ” (status), “knows Christ” (personal relationship), and conforms his life to Christ (sharing in Jesus’ suffering and death).

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Verse 9: “Faith in” or “Faith of”

- ❖ For Paul, Jesus’ faithfulness to the cross demonstrates God’s faithfulness to the covenant. The promise made to Abraham has been kept in and through Jesus.
 - Jesus is the faithful Israelite who offers faithful covenant obedience to God. Jesus is the faithful remnant of one. God’s work here is not a new plan. It is the old plan focused on one faithful Jew who will represent everyone else – this is key to understanding Paul.
 - The faithful death of the Messiah reveals to the world that the one true God has been good to his promises, rescuing a world gone wrong.
- ❖ Thus, the preferred translation in v. 9, as it sometimes is in Romans and Galatians, is the “faith of Christ” rather than “faith in Christ.”
 - The Greek grammar here is ambiguous and the decision as to translation has to be made on exegetical and theological grounds. “Faith of Christ” then ties back to the Christ-hymn of chapter 2.

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The Resurrection of the Dead (3:11)

- ❖ Paul talks about this “resurrection from the dead” at length in I Cor. 15. Just as Jesus was resurrected, so shall we be resurrected!
 - This is not mere resuscitation, a returning to life, it is resurrection, passing through death to the other side – to stay.
- ❖ This the physical, bodily resurrection of us all that we affirm every week when we pledge the Apostles’ Creed.
 - When we say we believe in “the resurrection of the body,” we are speaking of our own body, not Jesus’ body.
 - Jesus first, then the rest of us. Jesus’ resurrection will not have been unique. Just as Jesus was raised, so shall we be raised.
- ❖ What sort of body?
 - The Bible doesn’t tell us much. Jesus ate. He walked. One could touch his body. Once, he even seemed to appear in a closed room.
 - But the most important change is that spoken of by Paul: we will be changed in the “twinkling of an eye,” from “perishable” to “imperishable,” from “mortal to “immortal.” It is transformational – continuity and change.